**Leadership, Resilience, and Adaptability: A Journey from the Navy to Cybercrime**

**Education**

Eric K. Corpus

Old Dominion University

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Dr. Sherron Gordon-Phan

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**Abstract**

This personal narrative reflects on my journey from a 23-year Navy career to the pursuit of a Cybercrime degree, emphasizing themes of leadership, resilience, and adaptability. Drawing from experiences leading Navy SEAL operations and conducting high-stakes cyber investigations, I explore how these moments shaped my professional identity and prepared me for academic challenges. Transitioning to academia allowed me to bridge practical expertise with theoretical knowledge, fostering growth and enabling me to mentor the next generation. This narrative highlights how perseverance, reflective learning, and a commitment to lifelong improvement have defined my career and academic pursuits, culminating in a story of redemption and continuous growth.

## Personal Narrative: A Journey of Leadership and Growth

As I approach the completion of my Cybercrime degree, I reflect on how my 23-year Navy career laid the foundation for this milestone. My goal is to leverage my unique blend of leadership experience and technical expertise to mentor the next generation, equipping them to address evolving threats. My journey has been defined by leadership, resilience, and adaptability, values that have not only shaped my professional identity but also guided my transition to academia and lifelong learning.

## Learning to Lead at Scale

Leadership, for me, is a skill developed over time, defined by challenges, successes, and the responsibility of guiding others. During my Navy career, I had the privilege of leading hundreds of Sailors, transitioning from direct mentorship to empowering mid-level leaders. By equipping them with the tools, trust, and authority to execute a broader vision, I fostered a resilient and effective team.

One of the most rewarding experiences of my career was supporting Navy SEAL operations through intelligence work. My role required unwavering focus and trust in my team to identify "bad guys" and enable the SEALs to accomplish their missions. These operations, often in high-pressure environments, reinforced the importance of teamwork, strategic vision, and decision-making under stress—principles that remain central to my leadership philosophy.

Smith (2017) emphasizes that the way we frame challenges shapes our ability to overcome them. I have found this particularly relevant in moments of professional difficulty, as I often reframed setbacks as opportunities to learn and grow. This perspective has strengthened my resilience and allowed me to foster a similar mindset among the teams I have led.

## Adapting to High-Stakes Situations

Resilience and adaptability are traits honed through experience. Overseeing sensitive cyber investigations required meticulous planning and fostering a culture of trust. These efforts, often briefed to top Navy leadership, underscored the importance of clear expectations, effective delegation, and collective focus. These investigations often involved complex technical challenges, such as analyzing digital forensics data, coordinating with multiple agencies, and ensuring compliance with legal and ethical standards.

One of my most challenging moments occurred during a firefight under heavy enemy fire. My role was to monitor and relay critical communications intercepted from the enemy, but a sudden equipment malfunction temporarily rendered me unable to contribute. In that moment, I drew on my training, quickly repaired my equipment, and resumed relaying vital information while providing fire support to protect my team. This experience exemplified the importance of staying calm under pressure and adapting quickly to ensure mission success. It also reinforced my belief in the value of preparation and the ability to rely on both technical skills and mental resilience in critical situations.

## Transition to Academia: Bridging Experience and Theory

Transitioning to academia was a natural progression, allowing me to align my practical experiences with formal education in Cybercrime. My military career taught me that the solutions found in textbooks rarely account for the messy realities of real-world problems. In cybersecurity, the unpredictable nature of threats demands flexibility and critical thinking, skills honed during my years in the Navy.

Returning to college after an initial failure was a transformative experience. With the discipline instilled by my military background, I excelled academically, maintaining a 3.92 GPA while balancing high personal standards. Completing my degree is not just a personal

achievement but also a testament to the values of perseverance and adaptability that have defined my life.

Nguyen's (2013) concept of the ePortfolio as a "living portal" resonates deeply with me. Reflecting on my journey through this tool has allowed me to connect past experiences to present growth and future aspirations. The ePortfolio serves as a platform to showcase not only my achievements but also the lessons learned along the way. It is a tangible representation of how my experiences in the military and academia have shaped my identity, creating a bridge between my professional and personal goals.

## Teaching and Mentoring the Next Generation

One of the most rewarding aspects of my post-military career is teaching and mentoring. Guiding junior Sailors to overcome challenges and gain the confidence to mentor others has reaffirmed my commitment to fostering resilience and adaptability. I've come to understand that effective mentorship is not just about providing solutions but about empowering others to find their own paths and build their own leadership styles.

As McAdams (2001) highlights, narratives of redemption—where challenges lead to growth—are central to identity. My early academic setbacks became such a story, motivating me to return with renewed focus and purpose. These experiences have allowed me to relate to my students on a personal level, demonstrating that failure is not an endpoint but a steppingstone to success.

Smith's (2017) insight into framing setbacks as opportunities has shaped my approach to mentoring. By encouraging my students to view challenges as catalysts for growth, I hope to instill in them the resilience and adaptability that have been instrumental in my own journey.

## Conclusion: A Legacy of Growth and Resilience

My journey from a 23-year Navy career to the pursuit of a Cybercrime degree reflects a narrative of leadership, resilience, and adaptability. Each stage of my life has been defined by a commitment to excellence, whether enabling Navy SEAL missions, leading cyber teams, or embracing the challenges of academia. These experiences have taught me that growth is not a destination but a continuous process, fueled by reflection and a drive to overcome challenges.

As McAdams (2001) suggests, the stories we tell about ourselves give meaning to our lives. My story is one of redemption and purpose, with early academic setbacks serving as a foundation for later success. Completing my degree is a direct result of perseverance and the belief that it is never too late to grow, learn, and contribute.

Looking ahead, my goal is to equip the next generation with the skills and mindset needed to succeed in a rapidly changing world. My journey is not just about what I have achieved but about inspiring others to craft their own meaningful stories and embrace the continuous pursuit of growth. In doing so, I hope to leave a legacy of leadership and adaptability that extends far beyond my own career.

# References

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